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Rabbi Binyomin Sulzbacher
Headteacher
Manchester Mesivta
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Charlton Avenue
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Greater Manchester
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Dear Rabbi Sulzbacher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Manchester Mesivta School, Bury

Following my visit to your school on 12 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the subject leader for English, students, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I accompanied you on a learning walk to visit a range of lessons. I scrutinised the school improvement plan and other documents supplied by the school.

Context

There have been no changes to the context of the school since the inspection.

Main findings

You, and other members of staff in the school, have accepted the judgement in the October 2013 inspection. You recognise the need to improve aspects of teaching and leadership so that students' achievement improves, particularly in English. However, although staff have

embraced the need to change, a perception in the school that changes are being made 'for Ofsted' needs challenging.

The school's improvement plan focuses appropriately on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. The plan identifies key activities, success criteria and intermediate milestones. While the people responsible for actions are included in the plan, the people monitoring them and their actions are not always identified.

A relatively new system for tracking students' progress is helping you and other managers to monitor which students are on track to meet their targets. To develop further, this data analysis should give more emphasis to monitoring which students are making three and more-than-three levels of progress, rather than focusing on the key threshold measures. Recent curricular changes include a change to the length of lessons and more time for the teaching of English and mathematics. These changes have had the impact of reducing the time lost in students moving around the school and increased the continuity of learning.

Strategies to improve teaching are at an early stage. All staff have discussed how they can improve their practice in line with the improvements identified in the inspection report. Students say they have increasing opportunities to work things out for themselves. Teaching assistants have attended additional training but it is too soon to evaluate any impact of the training.

The school's records show that, lower down the school, more students are on track to achieve well in English and that gaps in achievement between English and mathematics are considerably narrower than those evident in 2013. However, the impact of the school's measures to improve results in English are not likely to be clear in the next set of GCSE results, given the exceptionally small size of the year group. A policy of assessing all students' literacy skills in Key Stage 3 identifies weaker readers and helps the school to notify parents and provide additional support. The impact of this support is mixed with some, but not all, students making better progress as a result. Staffing issues in English that had a negative effect on the progress some students in the past have now been dealt with. You agree that an additional English-specialist teacher will consolidate improvements and contribute to better achievement in a range of subjects. You have plans to make this additional appointment as soon as is feasible.

With the support of the headteacher of another local school, you have begun to review the school's performance management system. Staff are beginning to understand the increasingly important relationship between appraisal and the progress that pupils are making. You plan additional lesson observations to help identify where teachers' professional development should be targeted.

Governors recognise the need not only to support the school's leaders but also to challenge them. They have been involved in reviewing the school's improvement plan and evaluated the change to the length of lesson times. They are aware of where teachers are more effective and where they are less effective. They recognise the benefit of further training and the likely need to involve more people in the governance of the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since the inspection, the local authority has brokered support for the school's management and for its English department from a local secondary school. You view the support offered as extremely useful. However, it is in its early days and the impact of the support is not yet fully evident. The School Effectiveness Partner now visits the school for additional days; he provided advice in drawing up the school's improvement plan and has days planned to undertake, with you, joint observations of teaching. The local authority have begun the process of engaging a National Leader of Governance to review governance and offer support to the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bury and as below.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers

Her Majesty's Inspector